

VILLAGE GATE MIDDLE SCHOOL HEROIC JOURNEY CAMP 2017

Information for Parents

Dear Middle School Parents,

The heroic journey is an essential component of the Village Gate Middle School experience, and it informs the way we guide our students academically, socially and emotionally. The heroic journey is the fundamental narrative that mythologist Joseph Campbell identified in stories, fairy tales and myths across vast cultural and chronological divides. It reflects the most important human experience, that of growth and transformation, and at the most basic level it involves a separation from the known, an initiation of trials and challenges, and a return to the known world with a gift or boon of some kind.

Adolescence, the period of transformation from childhood to adulthood, is the first expression of the heroic journey that we can experience consciously. It is a crucial process, not only for the teenager, but for the teenager's community who needs its children to mature and carry on the responsibilities of the society. Historically many cultures have marked this transformation with a ritual or rite of passage in order to bring attention and solemnity to the process, but such rituals have for the most part disappeared in our modern American culture. This lack of formal ritual does not eliminate teens' natural desire to separate, to challenge themselves, and eventually to return as mature individuals. Left to their own devices, however, the separation and challenges they create for themselves can be destructive to themselves or others. At Village Gate we hope to provide our middle school students with a safe and engaging experience of their entrance into adolescence.

Our camping trip the first week of school serves as a symbolic and physical separation from the known world. We preface the departure with a day of exploration of the heroic journey and the idea of a rite of passage. Students will have an opportunity to design their own rite of passage that we will carry out at the camp. We will continue the tradition begun at Camp Marston of team work, leadership development and relationship building. In addition, students will have rich opportunities for self-reflection and discovery through journaling, discussions, story writing, art projects, games, and independent play, as well as the chance to experience significant challenges that mark the initiation process. The adolescents themselves will create and direct much of the activity that occurs over this three day experience.

We will complete the rite of passage with a celebratory return to school where parents and family members welcome back their adolescents and recognize them for the important commitment they've made to embarking upon this period of challenge and transformation.

Adolescence can be a scary and confusing time as much for parents as it is for the teens themselves. When they return from camp your teens may not share much of what they experienced at camp. This is a natural part of the separation that they need to make from their parents. Know that we are committed to fostering the healthy development of your teenagers in the most nurturing, encouraging, and positive environment, and we are happy to speak to you about any concerns or questions you have regarding camp or school and your teen's experience in general.

Thank you for sharing your precious children with us. We teach middle school because we delight in the joy and innovative spirit of early teens, and we are grateful for the opportunity to do what we love.

With gratitude,
Kathy and Caitlin